



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Food Safety and
Inspection
Service

Technical
Service
Center

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August 31, 1999

To: President's Council on Food Safety

Through: Dr. Mark Mina, Deputy Administrator for Field Operations

From: Paul Thompson, Director

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Subject: Comments on the Inter-Agency Food Safety Strategic Plan Goals and Objectives

I am writing to comment on USDA Federal Register Notice 98-045N (also FDA 97-N0074, and EPA OPP-00550) related to the strategic plan proposed by the President's Council on Food Safety. My input relates specifically to the key component of the food safety system that is referred to as "education." It is also related either to Goal 4 or Goal 5. Based on the comments that follow, the plan may be modified by revising an objective, or by including a specific action item.

I am Director of the Technical Service Center (TSC), recently established by FSIS in Omaha, Nebraska. The TSC has been the Agency's focal point for supplying information to assist with HACCP implementation in the meat and poultry industries. It is currently home to the HACCP Hotline, which is our primary vehicle for providing technical information to inspectors, their supervisors, plant owners and operators, industry trade representatives, academia, and consumers. Within a few weeks, the TSC will also become the sponsor of the Regulator's Food Safety Information Line, which is designed to provide technical information to federal, state, and local regulators regarding meat, poultry, and egg products. Associated with the TSC is the Donald Houston Training Center for Meat and Poultry Inspection Sciences. It is located at Texas A&M University in a state-of-the-art training facility. Both facilities are equipped with electronic communications technology that can be used to carry the message regarding food safety well into the next century.

The TSC is one of a number of assets that exist to provide information and education about food safety to a variety of stakeholders. The President's Council on Food Safety should take assets such as these into consideration as the inter-agency food safety strategic plan is being developed. Therefore, I propose that the plan provide for the establishment of a National Center for Food Safety Information and Education. Such a Center would support the goal of providing consistent, timely food safety information and education to federal, state, and local inspectors, their supervisors, plant and retail or restaurant owners and operators, trade association representatives, and consumers. We submitted a proposal for developing such a Center during this last year's FSIS Inspection Operations planning process. A copy of said

proposal is available for review if desired. Establishing this Center would improve the coordination and efficiency of government resources devoted to dealing with food safety, and it would help fill gaps that exist in our current food safety system. The National Center for Food safety Information and Education would be designed to capitalize on current resources, and be structured to focus the wide variety of food safety information and education resources that now exist, which are often currently underutilized because there is little or no coordination. Interest in establishing such a Center has been acknowledged within FDA and among AFDO members, as well as within USDA. A great deal of synergy can be obtained by coordinating these resources through the establishment of such a Center. The Center might be established at a specific physical location, such as the TSC, where representatives from various federal, state, local, and tribal officials would work together to provide information and education about food safety to all stakeholders – or it might be a coordinating body of representatives from various agency services, such as the TSC, that manages food safety information and education resources. Regardless, the food safety strategic plan should provide for a Center that serves as a focal point for coordinating information and education regarding food safety.

In addition to providing input about the plan, I am volunteering to assist in the planning process by offering the TSC as a site for public or stakeholder meetings related to the food safety strategic plan. We recently hosted the FSIS Technical Conference on HACCP Implementation. We have on site facilities that will accommodate approximately 50 persons. We have teleconferencing capabilities and will soon be equipped with satellite downlink capability. For larger groups, we contract for local meeting space. My staff would gladly help make any arrangements that are required.

Please contact me if you have any questions about my input, about the offer to assist in the planning process, or if you would like a copy of our original proposal for this service.